

ECONOMICS WORKSHOP REPORT

In April 2026, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) motioned for Council staff to hold a workshop “...to review the socioeconomic analyses supporting groundfish management measures and identify ways in which these analyses can be improved to help inform management” ([PFMC April 2026 Council Meeting Transcript](#)). This day-long workshop was then held on September 30, 2026, and included participants from the Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC), the Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC), the West Coast Region (WCR), Council staff, a Council member, current and former Science and Statistical Committee (SSC) members, and several contractors and academics with experience contributing to economic information and analyses used within the Council process.

The over-arching objective of the workshop was to identify ways that socioeconomic information can be used to better inform Council decision making, and it used the groundfish specifications process as a case study. To achieve this objective, the agenda for the workshop organized the day into five agenda items, as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Establishing the baseline
3. Identifying attributes of useful socioeconomic information
4. Case study: the groundfish specifications process
5. Synthesis, reporting back to the Council, and next steps

Agenda items were structured with a presentation followed by a guided discussion. These discussions helped to identify what social and economic information is available, how socioeconomic information is currently used within the Council process, what makes this information useful and effective for decision-making, and what limitations are currently preventing socioeconomic information from being used effectively in the Council process.

Workshop participants identified that under current Council operating structure, the economic information used within the Council process is often descriptive, retrospective (e.g., performance-monitoring), and explanatory. Participants widely agreed that current Council processes adequately allow for economic information to be used to describe the economic impact of past management decisions and monitor the impact that these decisions have on the economic viability of the fishery.

However, there is currently a lack of socioeconomic information being used to inform the design of policy alternatives or to predict the expected outcomes of alternative Council actions to inform decision-making. Socioeconomic information is typically not used to create management alternatives, rather it describes the impact of those alternatives once they are shaped and often based on simplistic assumptions such as full attainment of annual catch limits (ACLs).

The discussions held at the workshop identified two areas in which limitations to the use of socioeconomic information in the Council process are occurring: model and analysis challenges, and Council process challenges.

Model and analysis discussion summary

Current socioeconomic models and analyses used within the Council process are usually descriptive and estimate the economic impact of alternatives that have already been formulated. Workshop participants widely agreed that the socioeconomic information currently available to the Council can retrospectively describe social and economic outcomes from fisheries management. However, we may not always be able to differentiate the effects of policies from other factors that influence outcomes. As noted earlier, socioeconomic analyses are currently omitted from the design of alternatives and Council decision-making, preventing this information from being used effectively.

Predictive information and models could inform decision-making before it has already occurred, resulting in a more well-rounded analysis of management alternatives. Analyses that are tailored to produce comparative information by analyzing the economic impact of different policy choices would also be helpful for comparing alternatives or management decisions. These analyses could better estimate the impacts of a management decision within a multidisciplinary environment, where there are tradeoff decisions occurring across economic, biological, and social factors. This information can be time consuming to produce, however, and without proper workload planning may not be feasible given staffing and workload constraints.

Another limitation of the current integration of social and economic analysis that was discussed is the lack of multidisciplinary analysis occurring within the Council process, which can result in economic, biological, and social considerations being ignored outside of their respective disciplines and analyses. Different disciplinary analyses are typically carried out separately from one another, without considering trade-off decisions that may be occurring within the policy scenario.

Council process discussion summary

Socioeconomic information is often used implicitly within the Council process, meaning that economic and social considerations affect the framing of Council actions, proposed solutions, and final decisions but are not supported by transparent and objective data and model predictions. Rather, Council members are reliant on their own knowledge or expectations of social and economic conditions impacting fisheries and the expected impacts of alternative policy choices.

The term “frontloading” was used throughout the workshop to describe incorporating economic information into the development of management alternatives and policy scenarios. There are many instances in which economics is used to describe the impacts of decisions evaluating the impacts of alternatives that have already been finalized. Shifting the timing of when economic information is brought into the Council process to earlier in the process could support design and evaluation of policy alternatives before the alternatives have been finalized. This would allow for economics to be utilized more explicitly in the Council process.

Modifying when socioeconomic information is used in the Council would require additional strategic workload planning and anticipation of the Council's needs and economic objectives. For economists and social scientists from the NWFSC and SWFSC, this was noted as being a crucial step in being able to develop predictive models, and conduct analyses to properly inform management alternatives. Being able to better anticipate the Council's needs for these types of analyses would allow for more time to be spent developing models and tools for specific policy scenarios. Similarly, earlier incorporation of economic information and theory can help frame the purpose and needs for actions and provide insight about the potential magnitude of effects that proposed solutions might have on economic metrics of interest.

Proper communication of economic and social information, among National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) economists, Council staff, and the Council, is another important step in how this information is ultimately used in the Council process and was identified as a potential limitation during the workshop. Without appropriate communication of socioeconomic information, the improvement of models and frontloading of economic information may be ineffective. Gaps in how economic information is communicated to Council members, advisory bodies, and stakeholders is an important consideration when looking to use economic information effectively.

There were also discussions amongst participants regarding the workload capacity of the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) and how to develop long-term economic expertise within the GMT. The GMT experiences intense workload which has caused quick turnover of members with economic expertise. Workshop participants noted that it can take several years of membership on the GMT to understand how to engage with the process, which is then lost when economists rotate off of the GMT. Finding ways to improve the transfer of institutional knowledge from those with economic expertise on the GMT to new membership may help address this problem. It may also be useful to find other pathways to bring socioeconomic expertise to the GMT beyond relying on the expertise of GMT members or consider a rotational system (using WCR as a model) where Center economists attend meetings based on expertise and agenda topics.

Synthesis and suggested next steps

Following the discussions of what is limiting socioeconomic information from being used effectively in the Council process, workshop participants were asked to discuss potential next steps towards addressing these limitations.

The workshop underscored that social sciences in the Council process should be undertaken in the same manner as other sciences, such as stock assessment. The Council, with its NOAA and other partners, needs to promote a wide-ranging understanding of data collection, analyses, and legislative mandates such as the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and others, to support and inform management decisions. There was discussion at the workshop of offering a special session (evening or all-Advisory Body event) at a future Council meeting to provide an overview, and concrete examples, of the role of social sciences in meeting the Council mandates.

There is also a need for greater clarification regarding the Council's economic goals and objectives. Developing a better understanding of the Council's long-term economic goals would

allow analysts to more effectively predict the Council's analytical needs ahead of time. This may also help to identify which models within the groundfish specifications process should be prioritized for review, and if additional models need to be created to meet the Council's needs (such as bioeconomic or predictive models). While the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan establishes three economic objectives in the management of this fishery, the latest groundfish Catch Shares Program Review raised concerns about meeting these objectives, given the lack of full attainment of ACL and the downward trends in net revenues. Overall, there is a need for clearer articulation of the Council's economic goals and objectives, alongside a more proactive role for social and economic scientists in identifying the underlying factors that influence whether those objectives are achieved. This understanding can help determine what information and analytical tools are needed, inform the development of management alternatives, and support the evaluation of potential management responses. Council guidance on its objectives and management concerns remains important, but identifying the causes of problems and the analyses needed to understand them should be an integral part of the scientific process.

In addition to clarifying the Council's economic goals and objectives, there is a need to develop a deeper understanding of the social and economic systems underlying the outcomes the Council seeks to improve. Social and economic sciences can help identify the factors, relationships, and structural conditions that influence fishery performance and may prevent the attainment of social and economic objectives. This diagnostic work is distinct from identifying specific data needs or responding to requests for particular analyses. The Council may recognize an undesirable outcome or an unmet objective without knowing its underlying causes, what aspects of the system are contributing to the problem, or what changes might address it. Social and economic experts can help identify and characterize these problems, evaluate potential explanations, and determine what additional information and analyses are needed to inform possible management responses. Developing this understanding before identifying or refining management alternatives would help ensure that alternatives are directed at the underlying problems rather than simply addressing their observed symptoms. It would also help inform the Council about the range of potential management approaches, including options that may not otherwise be considered. This recommendation would require both a distinct process step, and also the use of social and economic expertise during this step.

There were also discussions regarding reviewing and updating models used in the groundfish specifications process. The non-trawl and trawl catch projection models were discussed by participants as being two possible models that could benefit from a review.

Lastly, workshop participants agreed that further discussions are needed to make progress on this work. The first step is to convene a working group, consisting of a subset of the workshop participants, that will meet on a regular basis to continue to discuss ways to better use social and economic information to inform the Council. Several interested participants from both science centers and the WCR demonstrated interest in convening and partaking in this working group. It was also suggested that this working group may be the appropriate body to assist in reviewing and updating the economic models used in the groundfish specifications process, along with selected members from the GMT and SSC Economics Subcommittee.

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